

# American Community Survey

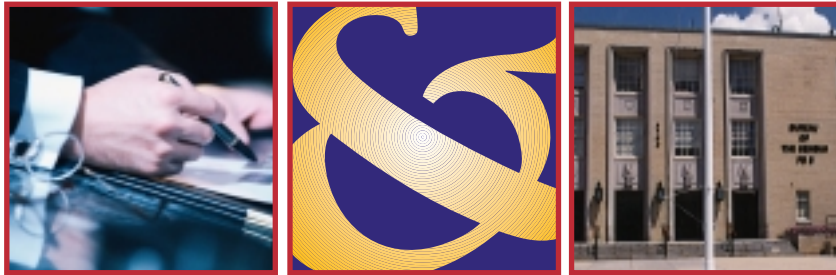


Questions and Answers

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

MSO/99-GACS  
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**U.S. CENSUS BUREAU**  
*Helping You Make Informed Decisions*



### What is the American Community Survey?

It is a new survey the U.S. Census Bureau is developing as part of the decennial program.

- The American Community Survey will provide critical economic, social, demographic, and housing information to this country's communities every year instead of once in 10 years from the decennial census. Communities tell us the American Community Survey helps them make informed decisions and is a key to their future.
- The U.S. Census Bureau plans to implement the American Community Survey in every county in the United States starting in 2003. It will replace the long form in the 2010 census and greatly simplify operations so that the focus of the 2010 census is solely on counting the population.

In response to the need policymakers and community leaders say they have for accurate, timely, and comparable information, the Census Bureau successfully reinvented a portion of the decennial census by developing the American Community Survey (ACS) to provide updated, social, economic, and housing information for local areas every year instead of once every 10 years. In addition, this reinvention means a better census in 2010.

In recognition of their significant contribution in support of reinventing Government, the Hammer Award was presented to the American Community Survey team in 1999.



**Winner:**  
**1999 Hammer Award**  
National Partnership for  
Reinventing Government



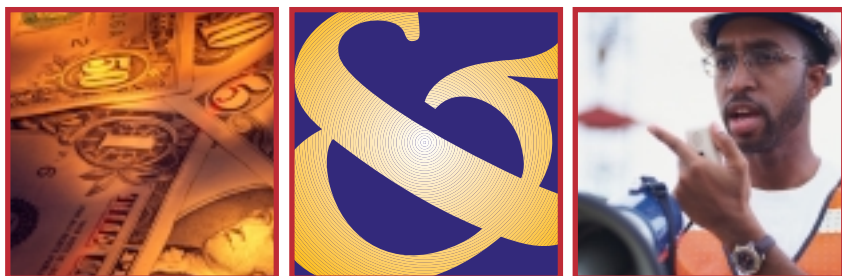
### I filled out the Census 2000 forms. Why do I have to answer the American Community Survey as well?

In the year 2000, less than 1 percent of households will receive both the American Community Survey and the Census 2000 short form (that is, the form with six population questions and one housing question that every household is asked to complete).

*It is important that both the Census 2000 questionnaire and the American Community Survey questionnaire be completed and returned.*

The American Community Survey provides critical economic, social, demographic, and housing information to this country's Federal, state, and local decisionmakers every year, instead of once in 10 years from

the decennial census "long form" (the additional social and economic questions that have traditionally been asked of 1 in 6 households). Community leaders use such information for budgeting, evaluating programs, and planning for community development projects. The questions on the American Community Survey questionnaire are essentially the same as those that have been asked as part of the decennial census long form. Every question on the long form is required by Federal law or court opinions to manage or evaluate Federal Government programs. The U.S. Census Bureau plans that the American Community Survey will replace the 2010 decennial long form.



**I feel that the American Community Survey is intrusive and impinges on my rights as a citizen. Why do you have to ask such personal questions?**

Every question on the American Community Survey is required by Federal law to manage or evaluate government programs. The questions on the American Community Survey questionnaire are essentially the same as those that have been asked as part of the decennial census. It is simply a change to collecting and updating the data annually instead of once in 10 years at the time of the decennial census. For example, through the American Community Survey:

- **Income** information makes it possible to compare the economic levels of different areas. Many Federal and state programs use such data to determine poverty status or to

distribute funds to improve the education of economically disadvantaged children. An example of a Federal law that requires these data is the Compensatory Education for the Disadvantaged Program—[20 U.S.C. 2711(c)(2)(A)-(C)].

- **Transportation** planners use summarized information to place bus stops and time traffic lights, to plan for peak volumes of traffic to reduce traffic congestion, to plan for parking, and to develop strategies such as carpooling programs and flexible work schedules. Decisions are made to build new roads or add capacity to existing roads and to develop transit systems such as light rail or subways by projecting ridership. Examples of Federal laws that require these data include Federal-Aid for Highways - Surface Transportation Program—

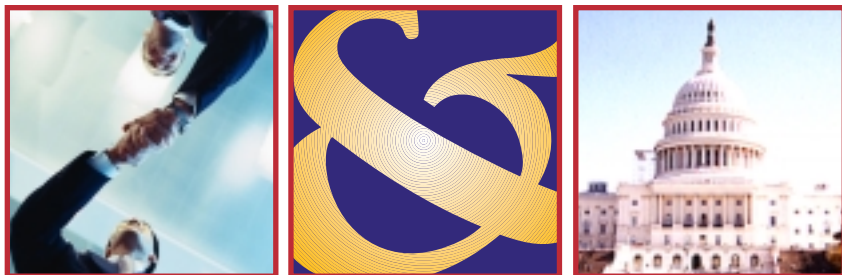


[23 U.S.C. 133], Public Transportation—[23 U.S.C. 142], Carpool and Vanpool Projects—[23 U.S.C. 146].

- **Military service** information is used primarily by the Department of Veterans Affairs to measure the needs of veterans and to evaluate veterans' programs dealing with education, employment, and health care. Examples of Federal laws that require these data include Disabled Veterans Outreach Program—[38 U.S.C. 4103A(a)(1) & (b)(2)] and Evaluation of Veterans Programs—[38 U.S.C. 527].
- Responses to questions about the **cost of utilities** are summarized into profiles that the Department of Housing and Urban Development uses to assess the need for housing assistance for elderly, handicapped, and low-income

homeowners. An example of a Federal law that requires these data is the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program—[42 U.S.C. 5305]. The Department of Energy uses such information to forecast the needs for residential energy supply and consumption. An example of a Federal law that requires these data is the Federal Energy Administration Act of 1974—[15 U.S.C. 764(a) & (b)].

- Grouped information about **industry and occupation** meets the needs of vocational education, employment, and training programs. An example of a Federal law that requires these data is the Job Training Partnership Act—[29 U.S.C. 1501 et seq., Sections 1511, 1518, 1532, 1551, 1602, 1603, 1661, 1707, & 1736].

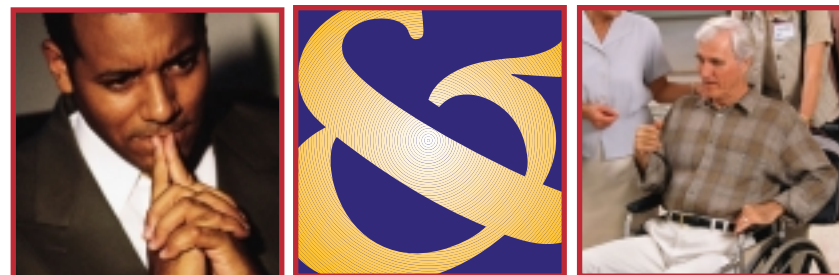


**Are the data confidential?  
Can the police, the local  
government, or other  
regulatory agencies see my  
answers to the survey?**

Your data are confidential under Title 13, United States Code, Section 214.

- Title 13 specifies that the U.S. Census Bureau can use the information provided by individuals for statistical purposes only and cannot publish or release information that would identify any individual. Instead, data are released as profiles of groups of individuals within broad geographic areas.

- The police cannot see it; the Immigration and Naturalization Service cannot see it; no other government agency can see it, and no court of law can see it. No one can see or use individual information for regulation.
- Congress has imposed severe criminal sanctions of up to 5 years imprisonment and/or up to a \$5,000 fine, for any U.S. Census Bureau employee who violates those provisions (13 U.S.C. Section 214).



**Do I have to answer the  
questions on the American  
Community Survey?**

Congress' decision that citizen participation in the decennial census is so important that there is a mandatory duty to respond, also applies to the American Community Survey. This is analogous to the mandatory responsibility of all citizens to serve on a jury if called to participate. The duty to respond is set forth in several sections of Federal law, specifically Title 13, Section 221. This decision means that the administration of Federal programs is based on more than guessing about the needs and resources of a community. At the same time, **the respondent's confidentiality is strictly protected** by law as discussed above.

**I am elderly, disabled, or  
otherwise unable to complete  
the American Community  
Survey questionnaire.  
What do I do?**

If a respondent is unable to complete the questionnaire, the respondent may designate another person to help complete the questionnaire. Or, a U.S. Census Bureau representative may call the respondent, or a field representative may come to their house and assist them in completing the form. Respondents may also call 1-800-354-7271 for assistance in completing the survey.

An individual address has a chance of selection only once in a 5-year period. Most households do not receive the survey. We include only a small percentage of addresses in the survey each year. **That is why it is so important that each household that is part of the survey responds.**





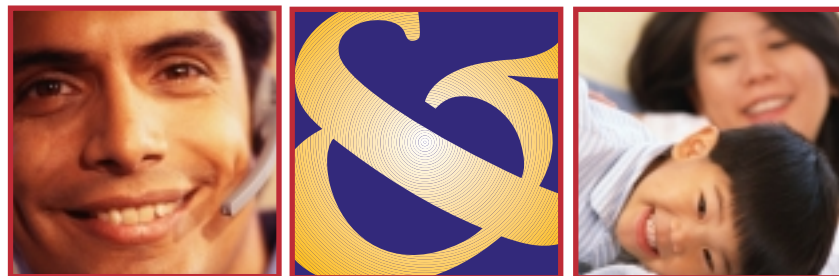
### How do I benefit by answering the American Community Survey?

Federal agencies, states, and communities say they do not have the up-to-date information they need to better understand community issues, respond to needs, and allocate programs and resources. A community leader said, "Guessing is always fun, but seldom effective."

By responding to the American Community Survey questionnaire, you are helping your community establish community goals, identify community problems and solutions, locate facilities and programs, and measure the performance of programs.

The American Community Survey data are used by:

- *Local governments* for budgeting, evaluating programs, and planning for community development projects.
- *Community programs*, such as for the elderly, scout programs, libraries, churches, banks, hospitals, and other community organizations, to provide services to the community and to locate buildings, services, and programs.
- *Transportation planners* (using summarized journey-to-work information) to plan for peak volumes of traffic to reduce traffic congestion, plan for parking, and to develop strategies such as carpooling programs and flexible work schedules. Decisions are made to build new roads or add capacity to existing roads, to develop transit systems such as light rail or subways by projecting ridership, and by businesses, for site location of new buildings and services, such as banks selecting sites for ATM machines.



- *Utility companies* to understand their customer bases so they can project future needs. Every time you turn on your water faucet or a light switch in your home, summarized census data are behind the services you receive.

### Why do you ask questions about Spanish/Hispanic/Latino and race?

The Census Bureau collects and publishes data on Hispanic origin and race based on guidelines that were revised by the Office of Management and Budget in October 1997.

The American Community Survey provides updates of the changing diversity of the American population at the local level and will provide more current demographic and economic profiles than have been available from the decennial census:

- For people of Hispanic origin, including, for example: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans.
- For major race groups, including, for example: White; Black or African-American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.
- For ancestry groups, including, for example: German, Italian, Irish, Arab, and French Canadian.
- For the foreign-born population.

### Do I have to answer these questions every year?

No. An *individual address* has a chance of selection only once in a 5-year period. People who move may get the survey more than once in 5 years, but an individual address will not be in the sample again for at least 5 years. Most households do not receive the survey. We include only a small percentage of addresses in the survey each year. That is why it is so important that each selected household respond to the survey.



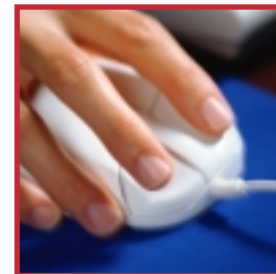
**I am only staying at this address temporarily. Do I still have to complete the questionnaire?**

For the American Community Survey, if you are staying for 2 or more months at your temporary address, please fill out the information for everyone living there. Also, please answer the housing questions on pages 4, 5, and 6 about the temporary residence (not your regular residence). If you are at the temporary residence for less than 2 months, complete only pages 4, 5, and 6 about the temporary residence and return the form.

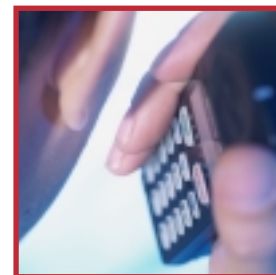
This information helps communities plan as the population changes at different times of the year.

**How do I contact someone from the American Community Survey directly if I have questions or concerns?**

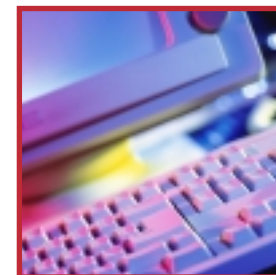
There are two easy methods. If you have Internet access, simply send an e-mail to: **[acs@census.gov](mailto:acs@census.gov)**. Analytical staff receive the mail and answer it daily. You may also contact American Community Survey staff toll-free at 1-888-456-7215.



E-mail: [acs@census.gov](mailto:acs@census.gov)



Phone: 1-888-456-7215



Internet:  
[www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/)